

DOING DIGITAL HISTORY AS A PUBLIC HISTORIAN: THE IMPLICATIONS AND
USES OF THE GROWING DIGITAL HISTORY FIELD FOR PUBLIC HISTORY

by

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Abstract

This honors thesis discusses the implications and uses of digital history for public history. It is based on an oral history and website building project for the Mint Hill Historical Society. Topics covered include, a review of the historiography, an examination of the website project as a case study, the connections between digital and public history, and what digital history means for public history. Ultimately, the thesis argues that the implications and uses of digital history for public history include increased accessibility, increased democratization of historical material and information, and enhanced feasibility of history projects for smaller institutions. The project completed for the Mint Hill Historical Society can be found at stepintohistory.org.

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Introduction

Both public history and digital history are fields that continue to be redefined. Digital history in particular is one that continuously evolves as technology and digital resources change and develop. As a fairly new field, the extent of the opportunities and dangers of digital history are not clear yet. Many historians, museums, libraries, and other organizations within history have created expansive digital history projects and experienced the benefits, as well as the difficulties of working with digital resources within the humanities. I use a case study of digital history to investigate opportunities for public history. The case study consists of the creation of a website to display the local oral histories collected by the Mint Hill Historical Society in Mint Hill, North Carolina.

In conjunction with the case study, this thesis explores the historiography surrounding digital history, particularly in the field of digital archives and collections. Researching other digital history projects, especially those completed by organizations of similar size and budget, enhances this discussion of the case study. These projects, while from an outside source, add examples of effectiveness and success, as they have been in place long enough to study these things. This honors thesis will discuss some of the implications and uses of digital history, notably the increased accessibility to and democratization of historical material and information, and enhanced feasibility of history projects for smaller institutions.

Using affordable hosting space from Reclaim Hosting and free, open-source software such as Omeka, I built a website for the Mint Hill Historical Society. This website will be a collection of the oral histories gathered by the Historical Society, both digitizing their collection, and creating an space online to reach the community. I analyze the historiography surrounding digital history, examine other digital history projects, detail the case study, and

investigate the connections to and implication of digital history for public history. Chapter one consists of the historiography, chapter two of the case study, and chapter three makes connections.

Chapter One: Background and Historiography

Digital advances and emerging technologies are constantly changing the way historians do history. Digital history itself is something that continues to be redefined and reapplied to the humanities. The concept of applying digital technology to the humanities, in particular to history, is something explored in Daniel Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig's book *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*, published in 2006. The authors approach the subject with a "promises and perils" paradigm.¹ This paradigm recognizes the promises of a "digital revolution" and the benefits of a "well-built, well-designed, and well-stocked history website," while also taking into account the failures and perils. These websites will not make a difference if there is no engaged audience. The "perils" also include the perceived threats to traditional scholarship and learning.²

Historians remain split over the applications of digital history and the debate between the promise and opportunities and the perils and dangers persists today. In a *Journal of American History* discussion surrounding the promises of digital history, the authors define "digital history" as "anything (research method, journal article, monograph, blog, classroom exercise) that uses digital technologies in creating, enhancing, or distributing historical research and scholarship."³ The participants in the discussion went on to offer various other

¹ Daniel Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 1-316.

² Ibid, introduction.

³ Daniel J. Cohen, Michael Frisch, Patrick Gallagher, Steven Mintz, Kirsten Sword, Amy

definitions of digital history, proving that the topic remains somewhat elusive to define. They also offer various benefits of digital history, including new archives and areas of inquiry, impacts on audience, and greater opportunities for collaboration.⁴

According to Kirsten Sword, digitizing archival materials create new sites for research and offers inspiration for study and inquiry that may not have been previously available. Digital history also creates “new bridges between academic and popular/public history.”⁵ The final benefit Sword mentions, collaboration, can also be considered a “peril.” While digital history projects are inherently collaborative, this is not the traditional form of academic history, and therefore there are few resources established to support it.⁶

An area particularly affected by digital advances is that of archives and record-keeping. Digital history has impacted both the way historians and digital humanists keep records as well as the working definition of the word “archives” itself. Through advances in technology, archival materials are being digitized and organized in online databases. Before digital archives, primary source materials were held in physical archives, meaning historians had to travel to various archives to complete research. While digital versions of physical materials cannot serve as perfect replacements, digital archives increase accessibility immensely. The growth of these “digital archives” has changed the field of archiving in ways that have not been always positively received. There are distinct differences between traditional archives and the sites often referred to as “digital archives.” In Kate Theimer’s articles, “Archives in Context and as Context” and “A Distinction Worth Exploring:

Murrell Taylor, William G. Thomas, and William J. Turkel. "Interchange: The Promise of Digital History," *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (2008): 453.

⁴ Ibid, 457.

⁵ Ibid, 458.

⁶ Ibid.

‘Archives’ and ‘Digital Historical Representations,’” she discusses these changes and reactions within the practice of archiving.

Theimer uses the umbrella term “digital historical representations” to describe the various things referred to as “digital archives.”⁷ She further defines these representations into three categories: collections of digital copies of paper and physical materials, collections of born-digital materials, and assembled collections of born-digital materials.⁸ These categories make some of the key differences between traditional and digital archives obvious.

Traditional archives are created to keep records of a person or organization, whereas so-called “digital archives” are often selected materials about a person or organization put together by an outside source for a specific purpose, or are, as Theimer says, “assembled.” “Digital archives” have another fundamental difference from traditional archives, and that is whether or not the materials are original. Physical archives contain original artifacts and papers while digital archives often contain copies of these. This inherently changes their context and meaning, and logistically means a digital copy can be present in multiple different places whereas an original is only in one place or archive.⁹

The question remains, are these differences infringing on the value and meaning of traditional archives? Traditional archives rely on three principles: provenance, original order, and collective control.¹⁰ Provenance is the place of origin of an object, or a record of its ownership. Original order maintains that records “...created, assembled, accumulated, and/or

⁷ Kate Theimer, “A Distinction Worth Exploring: ‘Archives’ and ‘Digital Historical Representations,’” *Journal of Digital Humanities* 3, no. 2 (2014).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kate Theimer, “Archives in Context and as Context,” *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2012).

maintained and used by an organization or individual must be kept together in their original order...”¹¹ This means the records should not be combined with other records or separated from each other. The third principle, collective control, is dependent on the first two principles. By maintaining original order and provenance, the records are collectively controlled and organized in aggregates.¹²

In assembled collections of digital history these principles can be lost, especially original order. Digitized copies of physical materials and born-digital materials can both exist in multiple places online, negating the principle of original order. Rather than a form of record-keeping, digital archives (or digital historical representations) often end up being more of a collection than an archive. Not only do digital materials frequently miss the principle of original order, but through digitizing and selecting individual items, the pieces are no longer part of an aggregate, losing the principle of collective control.

Word choice is essential when discussing and defining these “digital historical representations.” Considering that what many digital humanists refer to as “digital archives” do not fulfill the three main principles of traditional archives, should they be called archives? In Adrian Cunningham’s article, “Digital Curation/Digital Archiving: A View from the National Archives of Australia,” he argues that this is a misuse of the word. Cunningham argues that “from a recordkeeping perspective, the phrase ‘digital archive’ has been misused, even hijacked, and that this misuse obscures fundamental issues associated with the capture and long-term management of archival resources.”¹³ Theimer makes a similar argument, and

¹¹ “Statement of Principles,” Society of American Archivists, accessed October 26, 2017, https://www2.archivists.org/standards/DACS/statement_of_principles.

¹² Theimer, “Archives in Context and as Context,”

¹³ Adrian Cunningham, “Digital Curation/Digital Archiving: A View from the National Archives of Australia,” *The American Archivist* 71, no. 2 (2008): 530.

encourages a higher level of communication and collaboration between archivists and digital humanists in order to bridge this misunderstanding.¹⁴

Despite not meeting the principles of traditional archiving, these digital historical representations have great value for digital history. Uploading historical documents to online locations inherently makes them more accessible. Materials formerly reserved for those with the ability to travel are now available online. Many digital collections are easy to use and free of charge. For example, ProQuest Historical Newspapers offers over 55 million pages of digitized American newspapers for historians and the public to use.¹⁵ The Library of Congress, the largest library in the world, offers online collections of American history primary sources, including photographs, scanned paper materials, and more.¹⁶ Digital historical representations can be used in research, in exhibits, in teaching, and so much more.

One drawback to digital history is the digital divide. Andrew Hurley explores the interactions between digital history and the digital divide in his article, “Chasing the Frontiers of Digital Technology: Public History Meets the Digital Divide.” He defines the digital divide as a term used to “highlight the disparities in Internet access across socioeconomic hierarchies.”¹⁷ This divide has certainly decreased as technology becomes more affordable and accessible, but a divide remains, especially in ways people of differing socioeconomic classes use the internet.¹⁸ Hurley uses the Restoration Group and Virtual City

¹⁴ Theimer, “Archives in Context and as Context,”.

¹⁵ “Overview,” ProQuest, accessed October 26, 2017, <http://www.proquest.com/products-services/pq-hist-news.html>.

¹⁶ “About the Library,” Library of Congress, accessed October 26, 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/about/>.

¹⁷ Andrew Hurley, “Chasing the Frontiers of Digital Technology: Public History Meets the Digital Divide,” *The Public Historian* 38, no. 1, (2016): 71.

¹⁸ Hurley, 82.

project in St. Louis as a case study for digital history's effectiveness. The project failed at first, as it did not gain the local attention online that was expected. The failure was partly attributed to the fact that "privileged socioeconomic groups were more likely than marginalized population segments to use digital media interactively and produce content."¹⁹ The project was aimed at marginalized, low socioeconomic level populations and did not reach these populations. The project redirected their efforts and used door-to-door flyers rather than a blog post announcement, and hosted presentations with written feedback and software demos. This combination of "old-fashioned" methods and digital methods had a much better outcome and higher levels of feedback.

The National Council of Public History's blog, "History@Work," showcases many digital history projects within the realm of public history. "Digital history" is a well-used tag in the searchable archives. Some of these projects include the "Seward Family Digital Archive Project," "Hear, Here: Voices of Downtown La Crosse," and "The Semiotics of Sex: A History of Queer Identity Politics."²⁰ These projects all have very different missions, but each uses digital history to achieve their goals. The Seward Family Digital Archive Project is perhaps the most "typical" project when discussing digital archives. The project digitized its collection of William Seward, former United States Secretary of State's, papers. By incorporating the community's senior citizens along with the student interns, the project not only brought together various age groups, but it "created levels of investment that extend beyond the university and beyond the project itself, investments in one another and across the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Tag Archive- Digital History," National Council on Public History, accessed March 23, 2018, <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/tag/digital-history/>.

wider community.”²¹

Hear, Here: Voices of Downtown La Crosse is an audio-documentary project that connects oral histories to the location they occurred. The project pays special attention to people “traditionally underrepresented in historical narratives.”²² For La Crosse, Wisconsin this means homeless, LGBTQ, disabled, African American, Ho Chunk, and immigrant communities. The project is collaborative and continues to add stories to its database. To hear the stories, users call toll-free numbers that are listed on street signs placed geographically according to the story that is being told. Because the numbers are toll-free, the project is extremely inclusive and accessible, even to those without computers.²³ The accessibility and collaboration of this project make it a fantastic example of using digital history to create innovative and progressive public history projects. These projects are in turn more likely to encourage interaction with the local community and wider general public.

The Semiotics of Sex project is a multiplatform digital history project created to celebrate and memorialize the 150th anniversary of the world’s first queer political protest. The project aimed to uncover and remember a “lost” history.²⁴ Digital history is a great tool in uncovering “lost” histories because of its ability to create accessible information. Some examples of digital platforms used are SketchUp and Google Maps. SketchUp was used to

²¹ Carrie Knight, “Project Showcase: Seward Family Digital Archive Community Project Achievement,” National Council on Public History, December 20, 2017, accessed March 23, 2018, <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/project-showcase-seward-family-digital-archive-community-project-achievement/>.

²² “Project Showcase: Hear, Here,” National Council on Public History, September 26, 2016, accessed March 23, 2018, <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/project-showcase-hear-here/>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Gvgk Tang, “Project Showcase: The Semiotics of Sex,” National Council on Public History, July 14, 2017, accessed March 23, 2018, <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/project-showcase-the-semiotics-of-sex/>.

create a navigable, three-dimensional model of the hall where this “first queer political protest” took place. A biographical narrative of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs’ life as the first “gay activist” was created using Google Maps, allowing visitors to trace his life geographically. This inclusive and progressive digital public history project was created by a Temple University student.²⁵

In another example of digital projects advancing underrepresented histories, the Lowcountry Digital History Initiative in Charleston, South Carolina, created innovative digital history resources using open-source tools such as Omeka. Using these cheap, accessible digital tools, a medium sized library with a small budget was able to create digital resources that “highlight underrepresented race, class, gender, and labor histories within Charleston, the surrounding Lowcountry region, and the historically interconnected Atlantic world.”²⁶ Open-source and user-friendly programs such as Omeka allow museums, libraries, and other organizations to create platforms to reach larger audiences. These online exhibits allowed the LDHI to share a history and narrative of Charleston and the Lowcountry region that showcases its unique heritage of race, gender, and labor movements and avoided the too common pitfall of whitewashing southern history. These digital history initiatives further the advantages that “digital archives,” or digital historical representations, bring to the humanities.

Scholars created Omeka to provide museums, libraries, and archives an option to publish collections and exhibits online. This was an option not previously available to these

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ John W. White and Heather Gilbert, “Digital public history in the library: developing the Lowcountry Digital History Initiative at the College of Charleston,” in *Laying the Foundation: Digital Humanities in Academic Libraries* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2016), 36.

institutions. Developed by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, Omeka was meant to allow institutions to provide their visitors with “in-depth content” on their websites.²⁷ Not only did the project aim to provide this option, but it aimed to make it a free and open source option targeted towards small museums and historical sites.²⁸ The Omeka support pages are also free, and the blog style allows users to quickly get help, with no extra cost. By creating this free, open source program, Omeka allows smaller museums and libraries with small, or almost non-existent budgets, to establish a creative, effective, and innovative online presence.

The availability of free and open-source software such as Omeka are of clear importance to digital history, as they level the playing field for developing projects like the ones described above. The case study included in this thesis used Omeka to build a website. The organization the website was created for is a non-profit, small, rural historical society with a small budget. The limitations created by budgets often hold smaller institutions back from competing with larger, well-funded institutions. The use of resources provided by digital history lessen the importance of budget in creating innovative and accessible projects and allow institutions to reach a larger audience.

Chapter Two: Case Study

The Mint Hill Historical Society is located in Mint Hill, North Carolina, a small town outside of North Carolina’s largest city, Charlotte. The Historical Society was founded in 1985 after twenty-one citizens were inspired to preserve the old doctors’ office building after it went on the market. The group bought the building and moved it to the current site of the

²⁷ “Project,” Omeka, accessed March 23, 2018, <https://omeka.org/about/project/>.

²⁸ Ibid.

Carl J. McEwen Historic Village. The Mint Hill Country Doctor's Office was the first preservation project completed by the historical society, but several buildings have been added over the years to form the village. Currently it includes the doctor's office, the Ashcraft one room schoolhouse, the Ira V. Ferguson Country Store and the Gold Assay office. Along with these historic buildings, all moved there from various areas around Mint Hill, the Historical Society has added a blacksmith shop, corn crib, Woodwright shop, mill, and meat curing building. All together, these buildings give visitors an opportunity to "step into history" and experience what life was like in rural Mint Hill.²⁹

The Historical Society not only manages the daily upkeep of the historic village and oversees the intake and archiving of donations, but it has other functions for the community as well. From May to October the Society holds a Saturday Farmers Market at the village. The Farmers Market is an opportunity for community members to sell and buy locally grown produce, local meats, and handmade crafts. The Farmers Market is a popular town event and brings visitors through the museums as well, which are open for several hours each Saturday, each with a volunteer, costumed interpreter. The Society also hosts events throughout the year, including their popular Christmas Teas, an Autumn Jubilee, basket making classes, Ham radio operators meetings, and various others. The Christmas Teas are a large source of funding for the Society, and they sell out every year. Held in the schoolhouse, the hors d'oeuvres and types of teas served are planned months in advance, and are different each year.

The main function of the Society, however, is to facilitate the third grade field trips

²⁹ Carl J. McEwen Historic Village," Mint Hill Historical Society, accessed March 23, 2018, <http://www.minthillhistory.com/>.

from county schools. Almost every elementary school in the county sends their third graders to the village for a field trip in connection with North Carolina history. The North Carolina Public Schools Essential Standard for Curriculum and Instruction of third grade history is as follows, “Understand how events, individuals and ideas have influenced the history of local and regional communities.”³⁰ The village sees between 2,000 and 3,000 third graders each school year. These field trips are led by volunteer docents who dress in period attire and walk the students through the village and where they learn about country medicine, food storage, trade, and the schools in rural Mint Hill. The field trip is a well-known one in the Charlotte area, and one I took as a third grader in Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Schools. Particularly memorable are the medical instruments from the nineteenth century and the full human skeleton that is housed in the doctor’s office. The students also get to experience a small portion of a school day in a one-room schoolhouse.

The Historical Society is important and relevant member of the Mint Hill community, especially for the older generations. Many senior citizens regularly volunteer and spend time here, particularly on Fridays during the summer. Each Friday anywhere from five to ten people volunteer. Some volunteers are also members of the board, and all volunteers spend their day working around the village, doing anything from yard work to building new structures. Lunch is served at noon sharp, homemade each week by the Administrative Director. These volunteer members are essential to the functioning of the Historical Society, as there are few paid positions.

A founding member and current Executive Director of the Historical Society, Becky

³⁰ “North Carolina Essential Standards Third Grade Social Studies,” North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, December 2, 2010, accessed March 23, 2018, <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/curriculum/socialstudies/scos/3-5.pdf>.

Griffin, has devoted several decades of her life to the preservation of Mint Hill history and the building of the Historical Society. She is the heart of the society and a walking encyclopedia of knowledge about the town. She is well-loved and her devotion to the Historical Society is clear in everything she does. She has long recognized the value and importance of oral history in Mint Hill history. Over the years, beginning in the early 1990s, she and other members have amassed a large collection of recorded interviews with community members, many of whom have since passed away. Most are direct, one on one interviews with Griffin as the interviewer, but there are other types as well. Some are called “driving histories” and are recordings of someone driving or walking around the town, talking about various old buildings and the changes the town has undergone over the years.

The Project

These oral histories are on a variety of media, including cassette tapes, CDs, and DVDs. Many of the cassette tapes have been converted to CDs, but there remains a good amount of information held only on cassette. When I approached Sue McDonald, the Administrative Director, about possibly creating an online database or exhibit for the Historical Society, these interviews were her suggestion. She had a vision for a project called “Step Into History,” a website where the oral histories, or at least highlights of them, could be digitized and available for the public to browse. Along with the oral histories, she wanted other digital products to be included, such as the recent TV spot created by the Historical Society, and a few other videos about both the Historic Village and the town of Mint Hill. For this project, I decided to narrow the focus to the oral histories, and began the process of completing this project for the Historical Society.

The first step was to create an inventory of the oral histories collected by the

Historical Society over the years. Housed in various boxes, drawers, and CD cases, there were a total of 54 interviews with as many different members of the community. I organized these into a spreadsheet by media type, including the name of the interviewee and the date listed on the CD or cassette (see appendix A). Based on time available, the original goal for these interviews was to transcribe and upload five full interviews. I started with a couple CDs that held some of the interviews chosen for transcription by McDonald. The interviews range in length, but are mostly between an hour and two hours long.

Transcribing

Transcribing these manually would have required more time than I was able to spend, and so I researched transcription software online. There are many expensive options, but I was able to find a free machine transcription service with the help of my thesis director. I settled on VoiceBase, an online transcription service that offers both machine transcription and human transcription options. A free account with VoiceBase is easy to set up and users are automatically loaded with 50 hours of free machine transcription.³¹ Once logged into a new account, \$60 of machine credit is listed at the top and a tutorial is available to listen to and read as an example of a transcribed audio file. The tutorial gives instructions on how to upload and select files for transcription as well as tips for better transcription results. Recording the audio in a quiet room with no background noise is essential, along with participants using a strong, clear speaking voice. This gave me some cause for concern, as the interviews I had were sometimes hard to hear due to some background noise.

After uploading a file into VoiceBase, the user receives an email that includes “Auto

³¹ “Products,” VoiceBase, accessed March 28, 2018, <https://www.voicebase.com/speech-to-text/>.

Notes.” These are automatically generated keywords based on the transcription. These keywords can easily translate into tagged words on Omeka that will facilitate easy search ability and browsing. The tagged words on Omeka can be added to each individual item uploaded, and then used to browse any item with a specific tag. The transcriptions provided by VoiceBase are also connected to the audio file, for example, when listening to the audio file the corresponding sentence is highlighted. The machine transcriptions still have to be edited, as the software does not produce a perfect transcription.

In working with the CDs and VoiceBase, I encountered several issues. Unfortunately, my laptop does not have a CD drive, meaning I have to use an external drive or a different computer to upload. I solved this by renting a laptop from the technology desk at Appalachian State University's library, rather than purchasing an external drive. The first CD I attempted to upload did not contain any files, which made me slightly nervous about my success rate with the rest of them. But the next CD I tried contained about an hour and a half long interview. First I listened to parts of the CD, noticing there was significant background noise and that I could hear the interviewer much clearer than the interviewee. Again, this worried me that the free machine transcription services would not be able to pick up the words in the interview.

Uploading the audio files to VoiceBase proved to be a larger obstacle. Each time I attempted to upload the files from the CD to my online VoiceBase account, the progress would stop between 60 and 80% and the page would become unresponsive. This issue was a particularly frustrating one, as I encountered the issue even after using several different computers, CDs, and internet connections. After spending some time exploring the music and audio file storage on the computer I was using, and googling some terms I did not recognize,

I tried ripping the audio file from the CD to the computer. This allowed me to upload the file straight from the computer itself, rather than from the CD's files. This solved the issue, and the subsequent audio files uploaded to VoiceBase in a matter of minutes.

The transcriptions were returned to me within an hour or so, and the quality of the transcription was similar to what I expected from the free service. I was able to get two full transcriptions from the CDs, as one ended up being a blank CD. After exporting the transcriptions of Lem Long and Mickey Ellington's interviews to Microsoft Word, they ended up being 12,846 and 12,201 words respectively. I still needed three more interviews, so I returned to the Historical Society. While there, Sue McDonald picked a few of the interviews that were either from an especially prominent member of the community, or held information she felt was particularly interesting and relevant to Mint Hill and its population.

We discovered that several of these had been transcribed previously, during a project completed by a girl scout in 2002, including interviews with Becky Griffin, Fred Brown, and James Black. Because these were interviews that were considerably relevant to the Historical Society, as Becky Griffin was a founding member and is the current Executive Director, the scope of my work shifted slightly. Because I was using interviews that had been previously transcribed, rather than transcribing each on my own, I used the time I would have spent transcribing these three interviews to make additions to the website that were not originally planned, including more browsing options. I will continue to complete work on transcribing oral history for the Society both now and in the future, as it remains something that I feel strongly must be done.

At this same visit to the Historical Society, McDonald and I discussed the format of the website. She expressed an interest in the site displaying excerpts of the interview, rather

than the full interview. McDonald's hope is that by uploading interesting excerpts and highlights of the interviews, users may be curious and this curiosity will bring them to visit the Society to learn more, listen to full interviews, or simply ask questions. Excerpts are also inherently easier to read and digest, as they are shorter and focused on one topic. This will make the collection easier to browse and research, and will hopefully increase engagement with the Society itself.

Building the Website

I chose to use Reclaim Hosting for hosting and Omeka for the publishing platform, as I have experience with both. They are also both cost-effective; Omeka is a free, open source platform, and Reclaim offers a student/individual package for \$30 a year that provides 2GB, free domain registration, privacy protection, and their support system.³² Not only is this something I could afford as a donation to the Society, but once I pass the hosting space over the Historical Society, it will not be a large burden on their budget. My experience in website building comes from a Digital History course I took with Dr. Kristen Baldwin Deathridge at Appalachian State University in the spring of 2017. For this course I used Reclaim Hosting and Omeka to create about the history of a public school in Watauga County. I completed this with a partner, and we were assigned Hardin Park Elementary. After using Omeka to complete this project, and having an account with Reclaim Hosting, I felt prepared to jump into building this website.

The domain name suggested by Sue McDonald was "stepintohistory.com."

Unfortunately this domain name was taken, but the same name with .org was available. As

³² "Products," Reclaim Hosting, accessed March 23, 2018, <https://reclaimhosting.com/shared-hosting/>.

.org is generally associated with non-profit organizations, which the Mint Hill Historical Society is, it fit well. After purchasing the web space and downloading the Omeka application, I began to format the site. The Omeka application organizes the website into the following categories, or “pages”, “items”, “collections” of items, and “home.” The home page displays featured items and collections. This setup is meant to facilitate the building of an online archive of uploaded items, that can then be organized, or curated, into “exhibits.” By downloading the “Simple Pages” plug-in offered by Omeka, customizable pages are also possible. This allowed me to create an about page to describe the project as well as link to the Mint Hill Historical Society’s website.

The Omeka application for Reclaim Hosting comes preloaded with several themes and plugins. Themes are possible layouts, color schemes, and organizational plans that are further customizable. Because the three themes that are preloaded are fairly simple, I chose to use a theme offered by Omeka that requires download. There are also a large number of open-source plugins available for download. These must be downloaded first to the user’s personal computer and then to the user’s Omeka files. This became an issue for me as I was unclear on where these Omeka files are housed on my computer. After searching through my computer files, I looked to the instruction manuals provided by Omeka. These instructions ask users to open their “FTP client” to access their site and Omeka files. This was not something I had previously come across in my experience with Omeka and searches through the user manual did not give me any information to clarify this. Reclaim Hosting offers great customer support and I filed a “ticket” for technical support. I received a response within minutes with information directing me towards Reclaim’s instructions. They informed me that an FTP client is a separate piece of software used for large files, and that I could simply

use my client portal for Reclaim instead.

Downloading the themes and open-source plugins turned out to be very simple. I just needed to focus on Reclaim rather than Omeka. When a user logs into Reclaim Hosting they are directed to the “client area” from which the “cPanel” is an option. The cPanel includes the user’s file manager, where the Omeka files are housed. Here users can upload files from a personal computer and then extract them from the zip files into the Omeka folder. This allowed me to apply plugins like YouTube Import and Geolocation to the site. The YouTube Import plugin allows videos from YouTube to be uploaded by simply adding the URL. The Dublin Core metadata of the item will then include a link to the standard YouTube license as well as options to include a source and publisher. Dublin Core is the metadata standard used to describe digital sources added to “items” in Omeka. The Geolocation plugin allows locations to be assigned to items that are then displayed on a searchable map.

By downloading these plugins I was able to easily upload the TV spot produced by the Mint Hill Historical Society as in introduction to the historic village. This bypassed any video downloading or formatting I would have otherwise had to do, as well as providing rights to the video since the plugin including YouTube licensing links. The addition of the geolocation map through Google Maps gives visitors another, and more interactive, way to browse the items on the site. The locations assigned to items will be based on the content of the interview. For example, the excerpt of Becky Griffin’s interview discussing the founding of the Historical Society will be associated with the location of the Historical Society’s office and the excerpt discussing the acquisition and transfer of the Country Doctor’s Office building will be associated with the original location of the doctor’s office.

I encountered some small technical difficulties when applying the geolocation plugin.

It requires an API key to use Google Maps in this capacity. Before beginning this project, this was something I had never encountered, but Google offers a quick and simple link to get an API key as well as gives instructions on placing the key into the JavaScript console. To do this, I had to educate myself on several other tools, including JavaScript and html. After finding the html code that applies to the map, I searched for the specific line that Google listed. The code was extremely lengthy and did not appear to contain the line listed on the Google instructions. As it turned out, Reclaim had once again made things easier and included a spot to enter the API key in the configuration of the plugin. The roundabout way I discovered this was not a complete waste however, as I increased my knowledge and fluency in JavaScript and html.

Uploading Items

After deciding on a theme and uploading the necessary plugins, I began uploading the items, or interviews, to the site. When I originally planned the website for this project, I expected to use the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's "New South Voices" as an example. "New South Voices" is a digitized collection of oral histories operated by the Department of Special Collections at J. Murrey Atkins Library at UNCC. This collection holds over 700 full transcripts that document the history of the Charlotte region in North Carolina.³³ After making the change to excerpts, I looked for other online examples of oral collections that use excerpts. "StoryCorps" is an organization whose mission statement is as follows, "...to preserve and share humanity's stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world."³⁴ Their website includes excerpts of

³³ "New South Voices," J. Murrey Atkins Library UNC Charlotte, accessed March 29, 2018, <http://nsv.uncc.edu/nsv>.

³⁴ "About," StoryCorps, accessed March 28, 2018, <https://storycorps.org/about/>.

interviews from all kinds of people. The “stories” are displayed on the website with a picture of the speaker and an eye-catching quote. The excerpts are meant to be condensed and easy to listen to, but still meaningful.

“StoryCorps” became a better project to take inspiration from once I moved from full interviews to excerpts. Donald Richie discusses excerpting in relation to oral history in his book, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*. According to Richie, oral histories are typically interviews that are recorded, transcribed, and then placed in an archive or library. Excerpts are then taken from these archived interviews to be used in a “...publication, radio or video documentary, museum exhibition, dramatization or other form of public presentation.”³⁵ In the case of this project, the Mint Hill Historical Society would be considered the archive or library, and this website would then be a “public presentation.” This changes the purpose of the project slightly. Rather than forming a digital archive or collection, I am instead creating something perhaps closer to an exhibit. This change of purpose aligns with Kate Theimer’s arguments surrounding “digital historical representations” discussed in chapter one.

With this purpose in mind, I began selecting excerpts of the interviews to upload. In order to do this with some sort of rationale or organization, I decided to select excerpts based on location. For example, Becky Griffin talks about chartering the Historical Society and buying the land for the historic village and main office. This excerpt was easily linked to the address of the Historical Society. She also talks about buying and moving the various historic buildings to the village. These excerpts can be linked to the original locations of the buildings. This concept makes the website more of an exhibit on Mint Hill told by oral

³⁵ Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (Oxford: New York, 2003), 19.

history, than an archive of oral histories collected by the Mint Hill Historical Society.

Uploading items in Omeka is an easy process. The Dublin Core metadata form is a simple way to include information from a description and subject to source and publisher. Various types of files can be uploaded, and multiple files can be attached to one item. The plugins I downloaded added Scripto and Geolocation to this process. Scripto allowed me to include large amounts of text in the item, so that the transcription is linked to the audio file and Geolocation allowed me to include an address in the metadata of the item, which is then added to the map. I also was able to remove the “Dublin Core” heading that appears before this information on the website in the general Omeka settings, since this term is not a commonly known term, it was unnecessary for this website. The excerpts are now each an “item” on the website that includes the audio file of the corresponding section of the interview, the transcription of the excerpt, the metadata, location, and any other relevant information, such as a photo of the interviewee if available. The website will continue to be an ongoing work in progress, as there are hours of interviews still housed at the Historical Society, and the members will continue to record new oral histories as time goes on. (See Appendix B for images of website.)

Chapter Three: Connections and Implications

Public history and digital history connect in many different ways. Public History is history applied to the “real-world,” or history outside the academic sphere. The National Council of Public History defines public history as “history put to work in the world.”³⁶ It also mentions that a previous name for the field, “applied history” may be more intuitive, as

³⁶ “About the Field,” National Council on Public History, accessed March 28, 2018, <http://ncph.org/what-is-public-history/about-the-field/>.

public history is it is “history that is applied to real-world issues.”³⁷ Despite this description from the NCPH, public history is a notoriously difficult to define field. NCPH also compares the field to a United States Supreme Court definition of pornography, “I’ll know it when I see it.”³⁸ It can be simpler to say public historians work in places such as museums, historic sites, community projects, and governmental agencies, than to define what public history is or what public historians do. This elusive definition is one of the many things public history has in common with digital history.

While public history may be difficult to define, it has a certain set of characteristics; it is community-based, inclusive, and a deviation from the tradition of academic history. Public history typically extends beyond the classroom, and beyond the circle of academic historians. Public is in the name, indicating that a connection to the public and to the community is essential to the field. Hilda Kean discusses this connection to the public in her article, “People, Historians, and Public History: Demystifying the Process of History Making.” Kean argues that in classic definitions of both history and public history, the role of the historian is an active one, and the role of the public is considered passive. The public is defined as simple consumers of the professional historians’ knowledge. Bridging this divide and creating an active role for the public is an opportunity for public history.³⁹

Kean also offers a version of public history through the example of the Public History MA program at Ruskin College that adheres to this concept of making the public active in their history. The program places more weight on the “process of how the past becomes

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Hilda Kean, “People, Historians, and Public History: Demystifying the Process of History Making,” *The Public Historian* 32, no. 3 (2010): 26.

history” rather than distinctions between historians and the public.⁴⁰ This focus values “sharing, participating, and engaging,” and leads to “community-based histories.”⁴¹ By viewing the public as active, constant makers of history themselves, the roles are blurred. This allows things such as social history projects, oral histories, re-enactors, and family histories to be considered alongside “professional” history. Students in this program have investigated things such as oral history, social history, and their own personal history, as active agents in the making of history.⁴²

Other professionals have also commented on this concept as it relates to digital history, including Kristen Sword in the article, “Interchange: The Promise of Digital History.” Sword includes “new bridges between academic and popular/public history” as one of the promises of digital history.⁴³ While the acceptance and expansion of subfields such as oral history and social history are certainly positive and progressive, the addition of digital history here can also represent a peril. Digital history is a relatively new field, when compared to academic history. There are not the same standards and precautions within digital history that there are in academic. Digital history projects do not have to be peer-reviewed, which could open the door for misuse within the field. While this work is very public, the possible perils of engaging the public in the creation history cannot be ignored, especially when the history of topics such as human rights violations or violence are at stake. Robert Weible touches on this balancing act in his article, “Defining Public History: Is It

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 32.

⁴² Ibid, 34.

⁴³ Daniel J. Cohen, Michael Frisch, Patrick Gallagher, Steven Mintz, Kirsten Sword, Amy Murrell Taylor, William G. Thomas, and William J. Turkel, "Interchange: The Promise of Digital History," *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (2008): 458.

Possible? Is It Necessary?” Weible states that public historians have a duty to “raise professional standards and enhance the way people understand the past.”⁴⁴ He compromises, and argues that while public historians must allow community involvement and facilitate public engagement, they must also maintain the responsibility of having the “final edits.”⁴⁵ Public historians working in digital history must find the middle ground between providing an active role for the public, while also providing the standards and reviews normally delivered by peer-review.

Oral history, as defined and used in the case study, allows the public to become active agents in the making of their community’s history. The interviews cover large variety of community members, and certainly are a deviation from the concept of history being recorded or made by academic historians only. Digital history enhances this “demystifying” of history. Digitizing historical documents, uploading digitized oral history, and the creation of digital collections, archives, and exhibits all create greater accessibility. Online sources can be accessed from libraries, computer labs, people’s personal computers, and even smartphones. This eliminates the need to travel to an archive in order to access these materials. For example, the Library of Congress has extensive digital collections available for research, ranging from American newspapers, to maps and Presidential documents. Digital history can level the playing field for historical inquiry.

Digital history not only makes history more accessible to the public, but it can make it more public-friendly and offers opportunities for public engagement. Online historical

⁴⁴ Robert Weible, “Defining Public History: Is It Possible? Is It Necessary?,” *Perspectives on History*, March 2008, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/march-2008/defining-public-history-is-it-possible-is-it-necessary>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

exhibits are often more easily digested by the public than lengthy academic articles. This is not to say that the two examples can always be placed on the same level, but in the pursuit of public-friendly history, online exhibits are more accessible. By creating these accessible forms of history, digital history is democratizing the past. In an article titled “The Digitization and Democratization of Oral History” for the American Historical Association's newsmagazine *Perspectives on History*, Clifford Kuhn argues that digital technology “has been both democratizing and transformative” for oral history.⁴⁶

Considering public history is linked to community history, many smaller institutions such as County Museums and local historical societies are practicing public history. Digital history offers opportunities to create innovative, engaging, and meaningful digital projects for very little money. An institution armed with a computer and internet service has access to many different types of open-source products. The case study discussed in this research is an example of a digital history project completed for little money for a small, local historical society. The project described in the case study is also open-ended, another advantage of digital history.

Using standard software programs such as Omeka means future members and volunteers of the Historical Society will be able to continue work on the website. Digital work is inherently collaborative, and this website will provide opportunities for future interns at the Mint Hill Historical Society. Transcription projects are often ones in which many different people contribute over multiple years. This is true for “New South Voices,” the

⁴⁶ Clifford Kuhn, “The Digitization and Democratization of Oral History,” *Perspectives on History*, November 2013, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/november-2013/the-digitization-and-democratization-of-oral-history>.

UNC Charlotte collection of oral history mentioned in chapter two. “New South Voices” was originally created in 2003, but has been updated and overhauled in recent years. The list of students that have contributed to the project is lengthy, with two students listed as currently working on transcription and uploading.⁴⁷

The “Step Into History” project described in the case study will allow the Mint Hill Historical Society to increase the accessibility of their public history, provide innovative, digital materials to the community, and become an opportunity for future public history interns and volunteers. Because the website is brand new, the actual effect on the community and levels of engagement cannot be measured yet. However, the benefit of transcription and the creation of digital audio files can be examined. Creating backup digital files provides a safety net, protecting the recordings if the CDs or cassettes happened to be destroyed. Transcribing and uploading the interviews is also beneficial at base value, as it simplifies and streamlines research in these oral histories.

Conclusion

In review, the historiography of digital history reveals the debates that surround it. These debates question the implications of digital history on traditional historical work, especially archives and collections management. Kate Theimer’s distinction between the terms “digital archives” and “digital historical representations” is of particular importance.⁴⁸ These “digital historical representations” are changing the way historians practice history and challenging the traditional narrative. This challenge is not always welcomed, as the

⁴⁷ “About Us,” J. Murrey Atkins Library UNC Charlotte, accessed March 29, 2018, <http://nsv.uncc.edu/nsv/aboutus>.

⁴⁸ Theimer, “A Distinction Worth Exploring: ‘Archives’ and ‘Digital Historical Representations,’”.

“promises and perils” paradigm demonstrates.⁴⁹ As with any new innovation or change, there is hesitation and wariness. Digital history is not brand new, it has been around for several decades, but the constantly evolving nature of technology creates a unique aspect to the field in which, it is always somewhat new. The promises and perils of digital history are therefore also consistently evolving. As the accessibility of digital resources grows, so does the loosening of traditional standards and techniques.

The case study provides an in-depth example of the making of a digital history project. The Step Into History project explores the feasibility and promises made by open-source software that digital history provides. Omeka is one of the crowning achievements of the digital humanities, and promises to make creating online collections and exhibits simple and free. The use of Omeka in building the Step Into History website for the Mint Hill Historical Society illustrates the benefits it provides. The case study demonstrates the value and promise of digital history, especially in the case of small institutions with little room in their budgets for such projects.

The connections between digital history and public history are important, but there remains a distinction between the two. Sharon Leon, the director of Public Projects at the Center for History and New Media at George Mason, discusses this distinction in an interview with the Los Angeles Review of Books. Leon first makes the distinction between “doing history in public” and doing public history.⁵⁰ She defines public history as history directed at and made for a particular audience. For Leon, public history is not a “we will

⁴⁹ Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*.

⁵⁰ Sharon M. Leon, interview by Melissa Dinsman, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July 10, 2016.

build it, they will come, and they might be interested' mentality."⁵¹ She also relates this distinction to digital history, as she argues that while many people are creating digital history projects that are open to the public to engage with, it is not public history unless it is "...actually formed by a specific attention to preparing materials for a particular audience- to address their questions, to engage with them, to target a real conversation with the public about a particular aspect of history."⁵²

Leon also discusses what it will take to make the work being done in digital humanities (DH) relevant to the public. She describes the process of public history as several steps, preparation, knowledge of the audience, doing the work, and following-up after. In her opinion, DH only completes the middle step, rather than fully engaging with the audience and evaluating the effects. For Leon, DH needs to follow the steps of public history in order to fully understand the impact on the public it has.⁵³ The Step Into History project began with a request from the community, McDonald's vision for the website. In order to meet the qualifications laid out by Leon, the project will have to continue engaging with the community and evaluating its effect in order to avoid becoming simply "history in the public" rather than public history.

Opportunities for further research include further investigation of public response to digital history projects and the digital humanities as applied to other fields. The digital humanities cover an expansive number of disciplines and research in its use for fields such as library sciences, anthropology, and archaeology could easily relate to this case study and research. The case study also provides multiple opportunities for the future of this project at

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

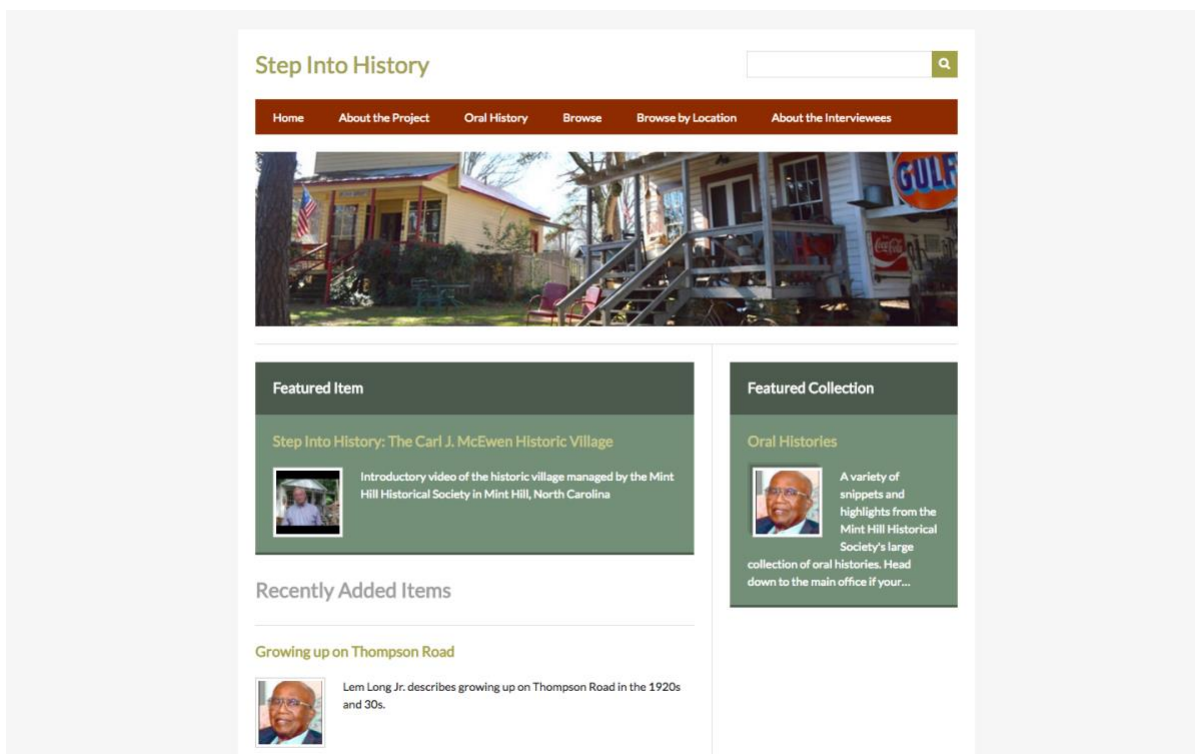
the Mint Hill Historical Society. As mentioned earlier, the nature of Omeka lends itself to collaboration, creating a space for future interns and volunteers to continue the work. The Historical Society's collections include many photographs and other types of recordings, which represent opportunities for the website to include various medias, and display a larger picture of the Historical Society and history of Mint Hill.

In conclusion, digital history provides many opportunities for public history, when correctly and appropriately applied. By combining the development of a digital history project with an investigation of both public and digital history, the implications and uses of digital history for public history clear are demonstrated with both research and a case study. These implications and uses revealed include increased accessibility, increased democratization of historical material and information, and enhanced feasibility of history projects for smaller institutions.

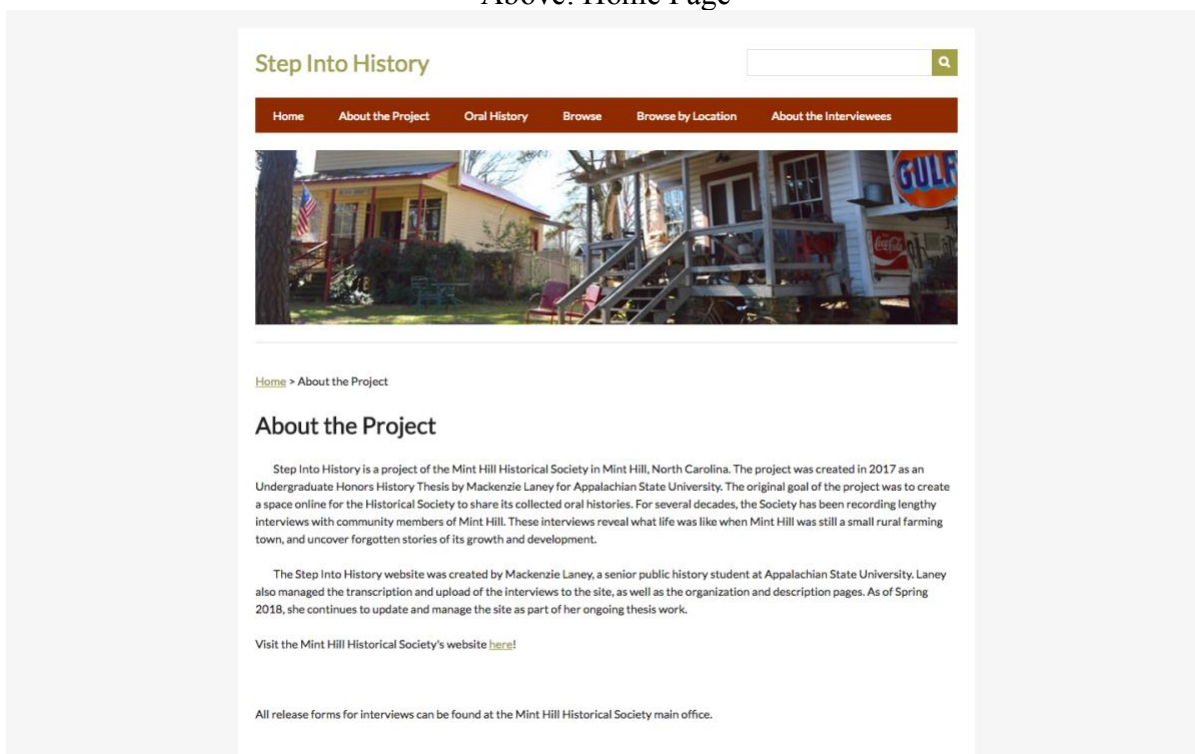
Appendix A

Interviewee	Media	Date
Aubrey Meyers Bartlett	CD/DVD	5-Feb-13
Avery Phillips	CD/DVD	Oct-09
Betty Forbis Ross	CD/DVD	10-Oct-08
Bill McWhirter	CD/DVD	Mar-08
Catherine Alexander	CD/DVD	5/7/2010 (or March)
DJ Houston Jr	CD/DVD	Feb-13
Dorothy Wilson Waltman	CD/DVD	19-Mar-10
Edith Long Williams	CD/DVD	16-Oct-08
Frank Lindsay	CD/DVD	29-Jan-10
Henry and Lynn Rhodes	CD/DVD	29-Sep-10
Henry Grathwohl Jr	CD/DVD	24-Aug-10
Herman and Zeb Morris	CD/DVD	22-Sep-09
James Black Sr	CD/DVD	20-Nov-09
Larry and Tom Black	CD/DVD	6-Oct-09
Lem Long Jr	CD/DVD	May-10
Margaret Pigg	CD/DVD	9-Sep-10
Mickey Ellington	CD/DVD	2-Oct-09
Norman Reynolds	CD/DVD	Aug-11
Polly Ross	CD/DVD	14-Jan-16
Raphael Cuthberston	CD/DVD	Sep-11
Rick Mullis	CD/DVD	16-Oct-08
Robert Whitley	CD/DVD	?2014
Ruth Flow	CD/DVD	4-Jan-08
Sally Cochran	CD/DVD	4-Jan-08
Thomas A Kerns	CD/DVD	9-Feb-10
Viola Boyd	CD/DVD	Mar-08
William Simon Wentz	CD/DVD	Mar-13
Bruce Johnson	DVD	2-Apr-09
Horace Helms	DVD	May-12
Katie McGill	DVD	May-12
Oscar Lee Flowe	DVD	May-12
Evelyn Henderson Allen	Cassette	Jun-05
Mae Bartlett Henderson	Cassette	2001
Betty Ross and Frances Eisley	Cassette	Feb-08
Bleeka Sustar	Cassette	3-Oct-02
Bobby Long	Cassette	17-Oct-06
Bobby Long	Cassette	9-Sep-02
Catherine Mullis Evans	Cassette	22-Nov-02
Everett and Lena Wilson	Cassette	29-Jul-03
Fred Brown	Cassette	4-Apr-02
Helen Anderson	Cassette	16-Jan-09
Henry Mullis	Cassette	20-Sep-03
Jim Black	Cassette	27-May-02
John Black	Cassette	7-Apr-07
Lena Russell	Cassette	5-Feb-07
Lola and Van Greene	Cassette	3-Jul-03
Lola Griffin Greene	Cassette	6-Apr-06
Louise Mullis	Cassette	undated
Mrs. Diehl- Ralph Crump	Cassette	3-Sep-02
Ranson Lee	Cassette	2-Apr-08
Walter K Gladden	Cassette	11-May-06
William Long	Cassette	Sep-07
Zelma McWhirter	Cassette	30-Apr-91

Appendix B



Above: Home Page



Above: About the Project Page

Step Into History


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About the Interviewees

James Black (1919-2017)

James Black was a lifelong resident of Mint Hill, North Carolina and served with the 15th Air Force in Italy in World War II, chairing the Mecklenburg County Selective Service (Draft) Board during the Vietnam War helped found VFW Post 4059 in Mint Hill. He was elected Post Commander, District Commander, State Commander, and later National Council Member. Mr. Black also chaired the Bain School Board during the 1960s. He served as Deacon, Elder and Elder Emeritus at Philadelphia Presbyterian Church and was Treasurer of the Church for over a decade. Mr. Black was also a 50-year member of the Masonic Order, Scottish Rite Bodies, and Oasis Temples of the Shrine.

Mr. Black was a founding member of the Mint Hill Historical Society and served as a Trustee until the age of 89. Mr. Black's influence on Mint Hill was great and he was awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine in 2005, the highest civilian honor in the State of North Carolina.



Above: About the Interviewees Page

Step Into History


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Oral Histories

Description

A variety of snippets and highlights from the Mint Hill Historical Society's large collection of oral histories. Head down to the main office if your curiosity has been piqued and you want to listen to full length interviews!

Social Bookmarking



Collection Items

Chartering the Mint Hill Historical Society: 1985



Listen to current Executive Director Becky Griffin tell the story of her inspiration to create the Mint Hill Historical Society.

Moving the Doctor's Office and Acquiring Land



Becky Griffin talks about the first building moved to the Carl J. McEwen Historic Village- the Mint

Above: Browse Collections (Oral History)

Step Into History


[Home](#) [About the Project](#) [Oral History](#) [Browse](#) [Browse by Location](#) [About the Interviewees](#)


Browse Items (15 total)

Browse All

Search Items

1 of 2 >

Sort by: [Title](#) [Creator](#) [Date Added](#) ▾

Growing up on Thompson Road



Lem Long Jr. describes growing up on Thompson Road in the 1920s and 30s.

Slave Cemetery



Lem Long Jr. describes an old slave cemetery in Mint Hill.

Featured Item

Step Into History: The Carl J. McEwen Historic Village



Introductory video of the historic village managed by the Mint Hill Historical Society in Mint Hill, North Carolina

Above: Browse Items

Step Into History

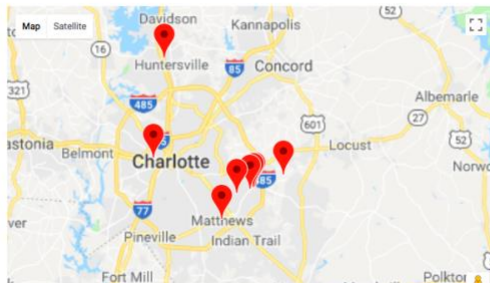

[Home](#) [About the Project](#) [Oral History](#) [Browse](#) [Browse by Location](#) [About the Interviewees](#)


Browse Items on the Map (15 total)

Browse All

Search Items

1 of 2 >



Find An Item on the Map

Step Into History: The Carl J. McEwen Historic Village


Chartering the Mint Hill Historical Society: 1985

Moving the Doctor's Office and Acquiring Land

Ira V. Ferguson Country Store

Above: Browse on Map (Browse by Location)

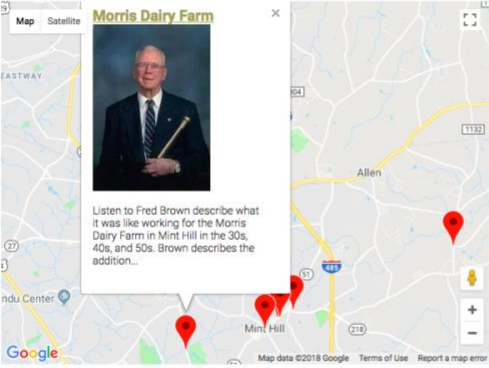
javascript:void(0);



Browse Items on the Map (15 total)

[Browse All](#) [Search Items](#)

1 of 2 >



Morris Dairy Farm

Listen to Fred Brown describe what it was like working for the Morris Dairy Farm in Mint Hill in the 30s, 40s, and 50s. Brown describes the addition...

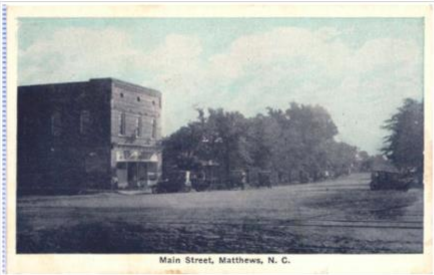
Map data ©2018 Google Terms of Use Report a map error

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[Browse by Location](#)
[About the Interviewees](#)

Above: Item shown on map

Matthews



Main Street, Matthews, N. C.

0:00 / 4:43

Title

Matthews

Description

Fred Brown talks about visiting Matthews as a child.

Creator

Fred Brown, Judy McRorie, Becky Griffin

Source

Photo Source: Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room Image Collection, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library

Collection

[Oral Histories](#)

Citation

Fred Brown, Judy McRorie, Becky Griffin, "Matthews," *Step Into History*, accessed April 16, 2018, <http://stepintohistory.org/items/show/14>.

Above: Example Item Page

Publisher

Mint Hill Historical Society

Date

April 4, 2002

Transcription

FRED: Fred Brown

JM: Judy McRorie

BG: Becky Griffin

BG – Tell us about visiting Matthews when you were a little boy.
 FRED – My earliest remembers of Matthews when I was a small child. My uncle, Moffet Brown, and my aunt and uncle, Mrs. Will Hood lived in Matthews. And we visited them once or twice a year. And I remember on one occasion coming to Matthews and we found out that Matthews had gotten electricity and they'd put some electric lights out in the street. (chuckle) Was quite a step. But as Matthews grew... Matthews originally, you know, was a little crossroad town called Fullwood, of which was a stage stop... for the stage to stop and called Fullwood. And it went by that for... until later on a railroad came through. They changed it to the name, Matthews, after one of the railroad's officials. And the town began to grow at that time. And here a few years ago, the Matthews Presbyterian Church asked me to come down and give a history of Matthews. I grew up in Huntersville, but I visited Matthews quite a few times in my youth and as memories goes back to the time when Matthews was no longer a stagecoach stop but it grew into quite a horse trading center. And my uncle, Will Hood, run a livery stable there, in Matthews. And I can recall visiting them at that time. And I even remember that my father used to come down to Matthews to trade horses sometimes. It was a great horse-trading center for a number of years and it grew on from there. And one night the Presbyterian Church asked me to come down and give a history of the church. And I did that, and I went back into the archives as far as I could go. And after the meeting, one little boy come up and says, "You know an awful lot about what happened back in the 17 and 1800's. Were you livin' back then?" (laughter) and I said "I'm only 90 years old. I couldn't quite..." (laughter)
 BG – Do you remember...What do you remember about the railroad? When did it come?
 FRED – I'm not sure which year it was. I've got a, I think I've got a record somewhere of

Above: Example Item Page continued

BG – Was that the Renfrow's then? I know they own it now.
 FRED – Yea. The Renfrow and the other, what's the other one?
 JM – Funderburk.
 FRED – Funderburk... was the two big mercantile stores. Both of them were general merchandise stores. You go there and got your medicines plus your horse collars. You name it, they had it. And I remember when I first came to Matthews, we had to go down there to make our return for tax. There at Renfrow's store.

Geolocation



Social Bookmarking



← Previous Item

Next Item →

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[Browse by Location](#) [About the Interviewees](#)

Above: Example Item Page continued

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